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Libya connection surfaces in Tafoya bombing report

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An automobile which authorities say accused hit man Eugene Tafoya admits fire-bombing was owned by an official of a Canadian firm with top secret contracts and connections with the Libyan government, the Rocky Mountain News has learned.

Tafoya, accused of attempting to kill a Libyan dissident student in Fort Collins last year, is suspected of fire-bombing a Jaguar belonging to Robert Manina in Kitchener, Ont.



Manina, believed to be living in Ireland, was not hurt during the 2 a.m. blast, which demolished his late-model Jaguar.

Manina, whose company manufactured top-secret surveillance equipment, also was linked with Edwin P. Wilson, a former CIA operative now living in Libya.

Authorities believe Manina had some business dealings with Wilson, the News has learned. Wilson has been indicted for running arms to the government of Libyan strongman Moammar Khadafy. (Related stories on pages 4 and 34.)

Tafoya has claimed he worked for Wilson in Libya on military training missions.

The 1979 fire-bombing in Canada surfaced in a transcript of a tape recording recovered last April from Tafoya's Ford Bronco.

Police in Kitchener said Thursday that a search of their files showed no suspicious fires on the date mentioned in the tape recording. But the News learned Friday that the investigation apparently was being handled specially by Kitchener authorities, and its existence was known to few.

One of Manina's former neighbors, William Pernfuss, told the News Manina was the vice president and general manager of Leigh Instruments, Ltd. He said Manina often flew to Libya and had business dealing with the governments of Libya and Ireland.

Pernfuss, an accountant, said Manina had told him that "strange things were happening in his plant" in the months before the explosion. He said Manina suspected theft of the secret equipment. He said he'd asked Canadian authorities to investigate, but they told him not to ask too many questions.

After the blast, Pernfuss said Manina confided that he suspected the CIA might have been behind the operation. "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the CIA blew up my car as a warning because of Libya," Pernfuss quoted Manina as saying. "The United States and Libya aren't on good terms."

Pernfuss said he and his wife "were blown out of bed" by the force of the blast. He said he immediately called Manina and told him to leave his house.

Pernfuss said minutes before the blast, a young boy across the street from the Manina residence received a call from a man inquiring if the house and Jaguar next-door belonged to "Bob Manina."

The Canadian bombing came to light this week when prosecutors gave a Fort Collins judge transcript of a tape recording of a man identified as Tafoya speaking of bombing a person in Canada. Tafoya allegedly made the tape himself. On the tape, a man authorities say is Tafoya assures a prospective employee that he followed orders to set the fire bomb in Kitchener on May 28.

The man Tafoya is talking with — named James — complains that no mention of the fire was made in a Toronto newspaper. Toronto is about 45 miles east of Kitchener.

James says that if he can find a newspaper account of the fire to show an unidentified boss, then further "assignments" would come Tafoya's way.

In the tape, the man identified as Tafoya tells James to obtain a copy of the Kitchener-Waterloo Record, which he claims had an account of the fire. James tells Tafoya that he planned to send someone to Canada to get a copy of the newspaper.

In the May 28 edition of the Kitchener-Waterloo Record, there is a four-line report of the Manina fire, according to a Kitchener city librarian.

That report is a far cry from the screaming headlines Tafoya thought would have made the newspaper, according to the transcript.

Newsweek magazine reported in July that an alleged "hit list" recovered from Tafoya's residence in Truth or Consequences, N.M., contained the names of seven associates of Wilson who "all ran afoul of Ed Wilson."

One name which appeared on the list was Kevin Mulcahy, a man who testified against Wilson at the arms running trial and who has helped investigators in the Tafoya case, the magazine said.

Tafoya is charged in Colorado with shooting Libyan dissident Faisal Zagallai twice in the head last October. Tafoya has told reporters that he thought he was working for the CIA at the time of the shooting and that his actions were in self-defense. Zagallai survived the attack but lost vision in one eye.

Authorities believe Wilson was the moving force behind the attacks on Zagallai and the fiery message to Manina.

The incident was the first reported shooting of a Libyan dissident in the United States. A series of shooting occurred in Europe in 1980 after Khadafy said in an April 27, 1980, speech that Libyans living abroad who did not return to Libya would be "liquidated."

Wilson is suspected of helping to train some of the assassination squads. There have been several reports alleging Wilson recruited former Green Berets to work in Libya for the Libyan government. Tafoya — a former Green Beret — says he worked for Wilson and that Wilson owes him \$36,000.

A report this week in the New York Times said Wilson also is suspected of organizing American pilots to fly for the Libyan air force.

Tafoya this week refused to allow authorities to take a sample of his voice so it could be compared with the voice on the tape recovered from the search of Tafoya's Ford Bronco. That led Fort Collins prosecutors to ask that Tafoya and his attorneys be cited for contempt.

Attorney Scott Robinson, one of the attorneys representing Tafoya, said the refusal resulted from a misunderstanding and that he'd recommend Tafoya submit to the test Monday.

Robinson assured a Rocky Mountain News reporter Thursday that there was absolutely no bombing or other incident in Kitchener, Ontario. He conceded Friday that he knew of an investigation concerning Manina.